

A Different Kind of Leadership

LECTURE NOTES



Undergraduate Medical Education
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



PHYSICIAN AS MANAGER

Prologue

The topics discussed during the lecture differ from the usual biochemistry or physiology studied in school. It's easy to memorize the amino acids but developing leadership skills require practice and repetition beyond a single afternoon. However, while these skills may take more time to develop, they will be retained for years. Your journey to improve your skills may not be linear. But, I promise you, it will be worth it. – Andrew Brown, 1T1

Leadership Defined

Leadership is a difficult term to define. It is more easily observed than it is explained. Most would agree that leadership is not about title, position or net worth. Most definitions capture the sense that leadership is the capacity to influence others to work together in the pursuit of a common purpose or goal. My favorite definition of leadership is “the ability to help people or organizations surpass themselves.” These definitions represent a departure from the traditional view. Leadership was once thought of as intrinsic or genetic and granted by position. Current research suggests leadership consists of a defined set of skills which can be developed and improved (Mohapel, 2008).

Leadership Metaphors

While everyone can learn and develop the various competencies which define leadership, most of us begin with certain notion of what leadership is. Our fundamental leadership framework can be inferred from the leadership metaphors we chose to align ourselves with. When presented with the leadership metaphor of the servant vs. the dictator, naturally some of us gravitate towards one of these symbols of leadership over the other. One who views leadership as a dictatorship is comfortable with a certain set leadership skills. These skills are the opposite of those a “servant” leader would possess. There are many different leadership metaphors – coach, facilitator, parent, communicator, sage. There is no right or wrong metaphor, the utility of understanding these metaphors comes from appreciating which subset of skills you are most comfortable with and which skills you need to improve to develop a full complement of leadership skills.

Leadership vs. Management

Oftentimes people confuse management and leadership. Although there is some overlap between leading and managing people, important differences exist. In the literature this is most often emphasized by comparing and contrasting certain aspects of management and leadership. Management is about maintaining stability in the face of potentially chaotic situations. Leadership is about embracing and coping with change (Mohapel, 2008). Problems are the focus of management, their prevention and solutions; while the focus of leadership is seizing opportunities. Management develops the capacity to achieve its goals by organizing a group of people and creating a set of jobs, staffing the job with qualified individuals, communicating the plan to those people, delegating responsibility, and devising systems monitor implementation (Kotter, 2001). The equivalent leadership activity, however, is aligning people. This means communicating the new direction to those who can create coalitions that understand the vision and are committed to its achievement. Finally, management ensures the plan is accomplished by problem-solving and monitoring results. But for leadership, achieving the vision requires motivating and inspiring, keeping people moving in the right direction despite major obstacles to change (Mohapel, 2008).

Part of the reason this has become so important is that the healthcare system has become more complex and volatile than the ever before. The net result is that doing what was done before is no longer the recipe for success. Major changes are required to survive in this new healthcare climate. More change demands more leadership (Mohapel, 2008).

Leadership Styles

Goleman (2000, 2002) identified six distinct leadership styles. Each leadership styles can be thought of as a constellation of activities and behaviors used by a leader. The first four styles are intrinsically positive, creating good feelings in people. His research demonstrates that leaders who used the positive styles saw considerable increases in the performance of their organizations. Perhaps more important is the fact that organizations with the best performance had leaders who used more than one of the six leadership styles, often seamlessly and to different measures. One particular set of behaviors may be better suited for a particular situation.

1. Visionary

This style effectively drives positive emotions and followers. Skills include the ability to articulate and rally people around one common vision. These leaders encourage people to be innovative, take risks, and work collaboratively. Knowing the big picture, and how their job fits in, helps people understand what is expected of them and emphasizes why their job matters. The sense that everyone is working towards a shared vision builds team commitment and pride. The visionary style is considered one of the most effective and should be used most often. However, it is not effective with a team of peers who are more experienced and might see a leader's grand vision as out of touch with the real issues of the group.

2. Coaching

A coach helps people to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Even though coaching focuses on personal development rather than actual performance, this style often results in a positive emotional response that in turn yields better results. By having personal conversations with people, a leader can demonstrate a genuine interest in the individuals they lead. This allows leaders to motivate by connecting people's daily activities to their long-term personal and career goals. Coaching creates an ongoing conversation that allows followers to listen to performance feedback more openly and seeing it as serving their own aspirations not just the boss's interests. Coaching is not effective when followers lack motivation or lack self-confidence. Coaching will also fail if the leader lacks the skills and sensitivity to help people along.

3. Affiliative

This style is associated with the open sharing of emotions. These leaders tend to value people and their feelings more than performance or results. These leaders strive to keep people happy and work to increase harmony, morale and trust in an organization. By recognizing team members as people, rather than tools, such leaders build remarkable loyalty and connectedness. This is style should not use alone because it can lead to poor performance if results take a back seat to feelings. Leaders may neglect to provide performance feedback that could help individuals improve. That's why many affiliative leaders use this style in tandem with the visionary approach. Visionary leaders state mission and let people know when their work is furthering the group's goals.

4. Democratic

A Democratic leader build consensus with participation. They tend to get more commitment from followers. This style works best when a leader is unsure which direction to take the organization and requires suggestions from competent team members. These leaders tend to listen well and react promptly to feedback. The drawbacks of this style are that building consensus can take time and it can result in endless meetings. The consequence of a leader who spends too much time searching for consensus, is a lack of direction and confusion amongst team members. It is not useful in times of crisis when more decisiveness is required or when team members are incompetent.

5. Pacesetting

These are leaders who expect excellence and exemplified it. This style can work extremely well in technical fields among skilled and intelligent professionals who need little direction. Pacesetting also makes sense in the early stages of organizations life when quick wins are essential. These leaders tend to be internally motivated, opportunistic and obsessive about doing things better and faster. They tend to quickly pinpoint poor performers, and if these team members can't execute, rescue the situation themselves. However, this style should be used sparingly, in the absence of self-awareness or empathy it can lead to low motivation and mindless compliance. This style needs be combined with the visionary or affiliative styles to be effective.

6. Commanding

This style relies on coercion, control and compliance, sometimes in the absence of explanation and praise. These leaders require tight control of a situation and may resort to threats and intimidation to get their way. Feedback tends to focus on the negative aspects of the team's performance. It may be an effective style in crisis situations, but tends to be the least effective in most situations. Usually leads to eroded spirits, pride and a loss of intrinsic satisfaction for work. In the absence of empathy it tends to be ineffective.

Why is it important to be flexible in terms of one's leadership styles?

Leaders can improve by increasing their repertoire of leadership styles. This way the leader is better equipped to manage the wide-ranging demands of leading a group of people. High-impact leaders are able to switch back and forth between styles at the right moment. Goleman's research suggests that leaders who have mastered four or more of the leadership styles foster the very best climate for performance. How do you know when to apply each leadership style? Exceptional leaders analyze individuals and groups to determine which leadership style is best suited for a given situation.

References:

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